SINOPSIS

China's Dual-Use Infrastructure in the Pacific

Dr. Domingo I-Kwei Yang
Coastwatchers 2.0
Assistant Research Fellow
Institute for National Defense and Security Research

SSANSE
SMALL STATES AND THE NEW SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

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CHINA IN CONTEXT AND PERSPECTIVE

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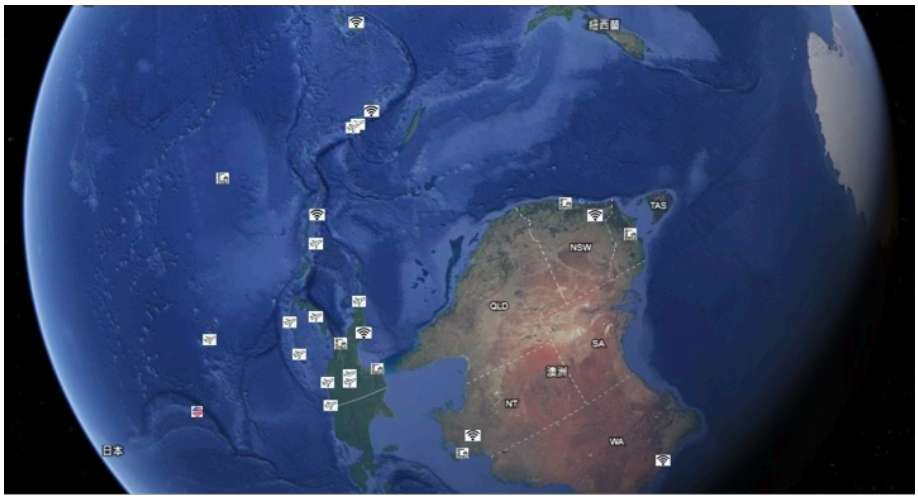

Executive Summary

China's military expansion in the Pacific has reached a new level of assertiveness with the February 2025 combat exercises[1] conducted by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the Tasman Sea. This unexpected move caught Australia, New Zealand, and other regional stakeholders off guard, disrupting air traffic for three days and raising significant security concerns.[2] This recent incident is part of China's broader, long-term strategy driven by hegemonic ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region. Beijing has been steadily reinforcing its presence through infrastructure development and growing security influence across the Pacific islands.[3]

China's military activities near Australia highlight Beijing's growing reconnaissance capabilities and dual-use influence in the region:

- In February 2022, Chinese warships targeted a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft with a military-grade laser.[4] The aircraft was conducting routine surveillance in Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Arafura Sea. China's military personnel illuminated the aircraft, which Australia's Department of Defence deemed dangerous and unprecedented. The RAAF was operating within international law under United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). China's actions raised concerns about its aggressive military posture and willingness to interfere with surveillance operations. China has previously targeted U.S. aircraft with lasers in Djibouti.[5]
- In July 2023, China deployed a Dongdiao-class (Type 815) intelligence-gathering ship off the Central Queensland Coast during the large-scale multinational military exercise *Talisman Sabre*.[6] Chinese military personnel used the vessel to monitor allied operations, employing its advanced radar and communications intelligence systems. The ship remained within Australia's EEZ but outside territorial waters. China's deployment reflects its strategy of closely surveilling military exercises involving U.S., Australian, and allied forces. This underscores China's growing intelligence capabilities and interest in regional power dynamics.

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1 Anne-Marie Brady, 'New Zealand's stark choice: Navigating uncharted waters', *The Press*, 13 March 2025, online.

2 'A shot across the bow: China signals new era of sea power in the South West Pacific', *The Diplomat*, 27 February 2025, online.

3 Andrew Hampton, 'The importance of intelligence cooperation with the Pacific', *NZSIS*, 7 March 2025, online.

4 'Chinese ship lasing of P-8A Poseidon on 17 February 2022', *Australian Government*, 22 February, 2022, online.

5 Jim Garamone, 'U.S. Protests Chinese Interference With U.S. Planes in Djibouti', *U.S. Department of Defense*, 3 March 2018, online.

6 Ridzwan Rahmat, 'Australia Releases Image of Chinese Intelligence Ship amid Major Exercise', *JANES*, 25 July 2023, online.

- On September 25, 2024, China fired an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with a dummy warhead into the Pacific Ocean, demonstrating an enhanced command of the situational awareness and positional data.[7]
- The October 2024 arrival of Chinese warships in Port Vila, Vanuatu further underscores this expanding military reach, marking the first known deployment of Type 055 Xianyang (108) and Type 052D Nanning (162) destroyers to the Pacific.[8]

These developments all reflect a deliberate strategy to strengthen China's military footprint and multiply its influence in a region of increasing geopolitical significance.

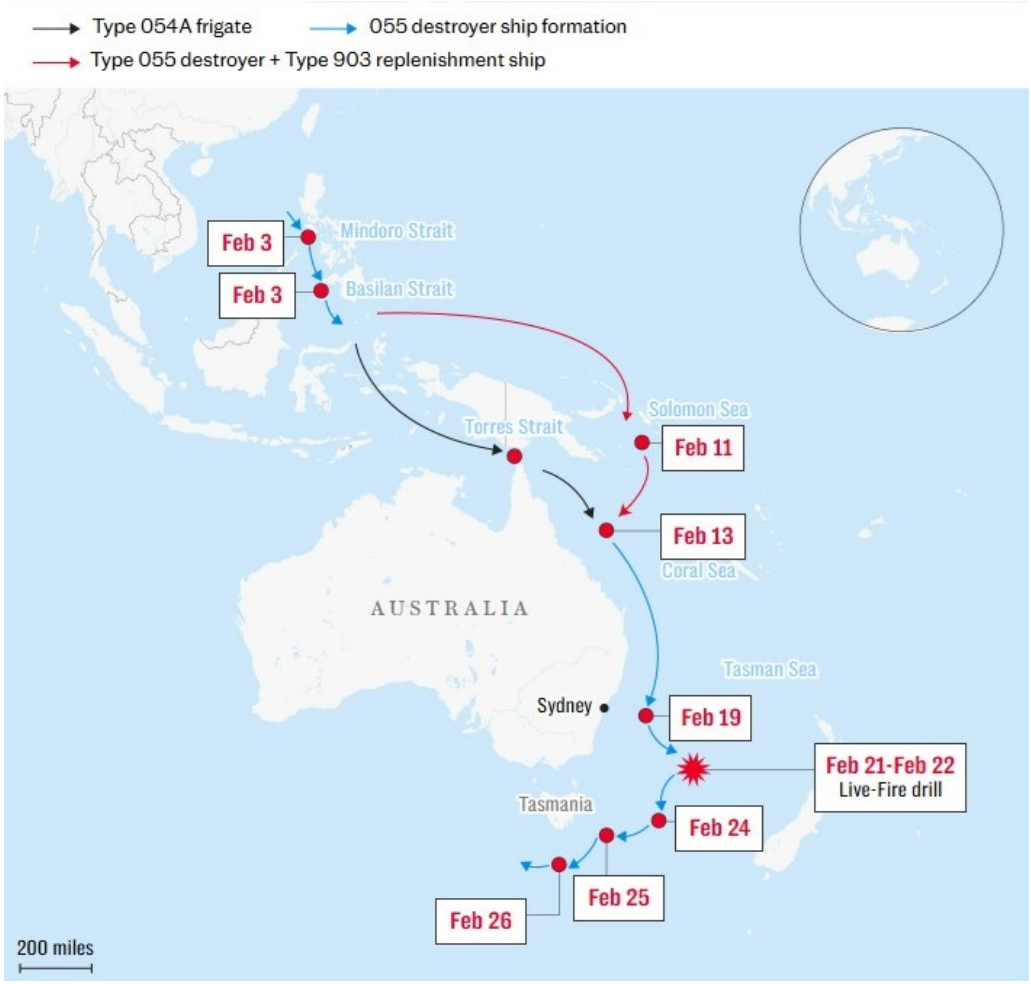

Figure 1: China's naval military exercise in the Tasman Sea[9]

7 Nectar Gan, 'China fires ICBM into Pacific Ocean in first such public test in decades as regional tensions flare', CNN, 26 September 2024, online; Hui Zhang, 'China's openness about its latest nuclear missile test shows growing confidence vis-à-vis the United States', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 16 October 2024, online.

8 'China Type 055 destroyer Xianyang makes first-ever South Pacific deployment to Vanuatu", *Army Recognition*, 21 October 2024, online.

9 Sarah Newey, 'How Chinese warships encircled Australia – without Canberra noticing', *The Telegraph*, 2 March 2025, online.

To unpack China's military presence and security interests in the Pacific, this policy paper suggests bringing China's dual-use facilities, which not only serve civilian functions, but also support military purposes, strengthen the PLA's power projection, and have the potential to disrupt joint mobilization among regional actors—into context. China's military reach is inconspicuous, embedded via its foreign investments and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects. Although research on the BRI has grown since 2013, most studies have focused on its economic and foreign aid aspects, often overlooking its security and military implications.

This paper explores whether China is preparing to weaponise its infrastructure in the Pacific to extend its hard power presence. It first analyses the strategic nature of the BRI in the region, arguing that China's geopolitical ambitions outweigh its economic objectives. The paper then identifies four key categories of strategic infrastructure: ports and wharves, fishery facilities, aeronautical hubs, and information and communications technology (ICT) networks. Finally, it explores the tactical impacts and investigates China's strategic use of dual-use infrastructures.

The paper argues that China's development projects in the Pacific serve as undercover infrastructures supporting the PLA's power projection toward the Third Island Chain. Far from being driven solely by economic interests, these infrastructure projects seek to multiply China's strategic influence through dual-use software, hardware, and a broader Chinese-built ecosystem. These assets could be weaponised in the transition from peace to war, limiting regional actors' freedom of action and enabling China to achieve its strategic objectives.

This report is timely, as Chinese companies bid for Ukraine's infrastructure reconstruction and Pacific countries like the Cook Islands[10] are signing on to new dual-use projects. It maps out the security risks of BRI projects and explores the correlation between Chinese dual-use infrastructure and the expanded Chinese military presence.

Key Findings:

i. China has extended its military reach deep into the Third Island Chain through the support and coordination of Chinese-built infrastructure located at key checkpoints. China's dual-use infrastructure is a force multiplier embedded in its foreign investments and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects.
ii. China's BRI is not merely about infrastructure but a vehicle for strategic influence. Unlike traditional foreign aid, BRI projects integrate economic, military, and intelligence objectives, notably in the South West Pacific, where strategic interests outweigh economic incentives. These infrastructure projects strengthen the PLA's power projection and its ability to disrupt joint mobilization among regional actors.
iii. China is expanding its military presence in the Indo-Pacific through strategic infrastructure investments and development projects in ports, fisheries, aviation, and digital infrastructure. These projects enhance China's regional influence, support military operations, and enable intelligence gathering.

10 Anne-Marie Brady, 'Cook Islands China shock a frog in the pot moment for Pacific security', *The Diplomat*, 18 February 2025, online; Olena Goncharova, 'China signals willingness to aid Ukraine's post-war reconstruction', *The Kyiv Independent*, 19 March 2025, online.

iv. China seeks to break through the First and Second Island Chains to assert itself as a sea power, counter U.S. dominance, secure energy routes, and establish a Southern Link connecting Asia and South America through strategic infrastructure hubs.

Introduction

In February 2025, Australia, New Zealand, and regional actors were caught off guard when the PLA conducted live-fire exercises there with little notice, forcing dozens of flights to reroute.[11] The incident served as a wake-up call, highlighting China's expanding military reach beyond the Third Island Chain. China's military presence in the Pacific will continue to grow, driven by its expanding hegemonic ambitions in the region. China has been steadily building its military capabilities and extending its security sphere through infrastructure projects in the Pacific for many years.

China's military reach is hidden, embedded in its foreign investments and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects. While research on the BRI has expanded since 2013, most studies focus on economics and foreign aid, downplaying its security and military dimensions.[12] Even as China's overseas basing ambitions draw attention—especially after its first military base in Djibouti in 2017—the security risks of its Pacific infrastructure projects remain largely ignored.[13]

Control of the island nations of the South West Pacific is vital for any rising power seeking regional dominance in the Indo-Pacific. Had Japan secured uncontested control, its navy and air forces could have severed sea lines between the U.S. and its wartime military partners Australia, New Zealand and Free France forces while leveraging land-based air units and local logistics against their naval forces.[14] Today, China also views the Pacific as crucial, integrating it into its Maritime Silk Road strategy under the BRI, linking the South China Sea to the broader Pacific.[15] All ten of China's Pacific small island developing state (SIDS) diplomatic partners have joined the BRI,

11 Renju Jose and Lucy Craymer, 'Chinese navy drill in Tasman Sea forced 49 flights to change paths, Australian official says', *Reuters*, 25 February 2025, online.

12 Zhang Ying, 'The Belt and Road Initiative in South Pacific Island Countries', *Pacific Journal*, 2019, 27: 1, online; Sun Degang, 'China's Seaport Diplomacy: Theory and Practice', *World Economics and Politics*, 2018, 40:5, pp. 4-32.

13 Daniel R. Russel and Blake H. Berger, 'Weaponizing the Belt and Road Initiative', *The Asia Society*, 8 September 2020, online; Cristina L. Garafola et al., 'China's Global Basing Ambitions', *Rand*, 8 December 2022, online; Alex Wooley et al., 'Harboring Global Ambitions: China's Ports Footprint and Implications for Future Overseas Naval Bases', *AidData*, 25 July 2023, online.

14 Lucas Myers, 'The Pacific War's Lessons for the Continued Strategic Importance of Oceania', *Wilson Center*, 14 August 2024, online.

15 'Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road', *www.gov.cn*, 20 June 2017, online.

and China is the region's second-largest aid donor.[16]

This policy paper explores whether China is preparing to weaponise its infrastructure in the Pacific to strengthen its hard power presence. It first analyses the strategic nature of the BRI in the region, arguing that China's geopolitical ambitions outweigh its economic objectives. It then identifies four key categories of strategic infrastructure: ports and wharves, fishery facilities, aeronautical hubs, and ICT networks. The paper further explores how these assets could be militarised before assessing China's long-term strategy for leveraging them in the Pacific.

This paper argues that China uses its development projects in the Pacific as covert infrastructures to advance the PLA's force projection toward the Third Island Chain. Far from serving purely economic interests, these projects act as force multipliers—tangible and intangible assets that enhance military capability and strategic value.[17] Through dual-use infrastructure, technology, software, and hardware, China expands its influence and strengthens its military reach. In a transition from peace to war, these assets could be weaponised to restrict regional actors' freedom of action.

1. The Hidden Nature of China's Dual Use Infrastructure

China's BRI is not merely about infrastructure but a vehicle for strategic influence. Unlike traditional foreign aid, BRI projects integrate economic, military, and intelligence objectives, particularly in the Pacific, where strategic values outweigh economic incentives.

Unlike Official Development Assistance (ODA), which is typically driven by humanitarian or social welfare goals, China's BRI projects are strategic investments aimed at expanding its geopolitical influence. China's BRI development projects do not adhere to ODA criteria; instead, they serve commercial and security interests. The OECD-DAC classifies foreign aid into ODA and Other Official Flows (OOF).[18] ODA focuses on economic development and welfare, requiring a grant element of at least 25 percent, while OOF lacks these conditions and may include commercial activities like export credits. Research by AidData at William & Mary's Global Research Institute finds that most of China's development finance consists of OOF, not ODA.[19] For nearly two decades, China has provided state-backed loans that do not meet ODA standards

16 These Pacific BRI partners are Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Micronesia, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Note that New Zealand is not a BRI partner because it signed a non-binding Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with China. Please see 'Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)', *Green Finance and Development Center*, February 2025, online; 'Pacific Aid Map', *Lowy Institute*, 30 January 2024, online.

17 Trevor Nevitt Dupuy, *Dictionary of Military Terms*. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1985, 97.

18 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 'Other official flows (OOF)', *OECD Data*, 2022, online.

19 Ammar A. Malik et al., 'Banking on the Belt and Road: Insights from a new global dataset of 13,427 Chinese development projects', *AidData*, 29 September 2021, online.

globally.[20]

China's commercially and strategically oriented OOF is a policy stemming from Beijing's 1994 "Grand Strategy of Economics and Trade" (大经贸战略).[21] It aimed to combine China's foreign aid projects with commercial and strategic objectives. China's Export-Import Bank of China (China Exim Bank) was established in the same year, allowing China to leverage aid projects to boost exports, foster a favorable environment for Chinese enterprises on a global scale, and to expand China's strategic sphere.

China's development support to the Pacific SIDS totaled US$ 43 billion from 2008 to 2022, with US$ 29 billion in loans and only US$ 14 billion in grants. China is the region's largest lender.[22] Notably, China is the largest lender to Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, and Tonga.[23]

The Pacific offers comparatively fewer economic incentives for Chinese investment, as evidenced by its marginal share in Beijing's global investment portfolio. Between 2005 and 2022, China directed the bulk of its foreign investments toward Europe (US$ 454 billion), East Asia (US$ 329 billion), and other regions with higher commercial returns, while the Pacific region received significantly less attention.[24] In the Pacific, China only has significant investments in Australia, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands.[25] China's development projects in the Pacific are less driven by commercial interests than by geopolitical strategy, as Beijing seeks to expand its strategic influence in a region of geopolitical significance.

1.1 *The Security-Development Nexus*

In 2014, the Xi government launched an initiative to create a China-centered economic and political bloc, one that will reshape the global order.[26] The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) builds on China's "going out" (走出去) policy launched in 1999 in the Jiang Zemin era and continued into the Hu Jintao era, which encouraged public-private partnerships

20 Axel Dreher et al., 'Apples and Dragon Fruits: The Determinants of Aid and Other Forms of State Financing from China to Africa', *International Studies Quarterly*, 2018, 62:1, 182-194.

21 Lǐ lán-qīng [李嵐清], Several Issues Regarding the Implementation of the 14th National Congress Spirit in Foreign Economic and Trade Work [關於對外經濟貿易工作落實十四大精神的幾個問題], *Almanac of China's Foreign Economic Relations and Trade*, 1993 [中國對外經濟貿易年鑒1993年], Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1993.

22 Riley Duke and Alexandre Dayant, 'China's Pacific aid is rebounding and recalibrated', *Lowy Institute*, 21 November 2024, online.

23 'Pacific Aid Map', *Lowy Institute*, 31 January 2024, online.

24 'Total Chinese investments between 2005 and mid-2022, by global region', *Statista*, 7 October 2022, online.

25 'China Global Investment Tracker', *AEI*, 2022, online.

26 Peng Guangqian [彭光謙], 'The Belt and Road Initiative: Strategic Vision and the Reshaping of the International Order' [一帶一路: 戰略構想與國際秩序重構], *Xinhua*, 9 January 2015, online.

between Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and Chinese companies to acquire global natural resource assets and seek international infrastructure projects.[27] BRI is part of China's informatization strategy, which amongst other things, requires global partners to host China's Beidou GPS ground stations that will enable China to establish fully global C⁴ISR capabilities.[28]

Under Xi Jinping, the PLA's role has become closely entwined with China's global economic and development ambitions. *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces* (2013) is a plan to strengthen China's overseas operational capabilities to protect economic projects, energy resources, and strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs).[29] PLA overseas military activities are framed as safeguarding China's interests and supporting foreign aid efforts.

In recent years, China has leveraged international organizations, particularly development banks like the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and World Bank (WB), to expand both its infrastructure footprint and security interests in the Pacific. By 2019, the ADB has financed 75% of China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) projects in Vanuatu and 90% of China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) projects in Papua New Guinea.[30] As a major ADB shareholder, Beijing shapes funding priorities to favor infrastructure projects dominated by Chinese firms, which consistently win bids due to cost efficiency and government backing. It is estimated that over 75% of ADB contracts in the Pacific have been awarded to China's state-owned enterprises.[31] This strategy allows China to extend its economic and strategic influence in the Pacific while minimizing direct financial risk and scrutiny, as these projects are commissioned by the ADB.

China's development projects in the Pacific are a covert strategy to expand its military and intelligence presence, reinforcing its regional influence.[32] In Beijing's policy framework, development and security are inseparable, making foreign aid a vehicle for advancing strategic interests. These projects serve military purposes, strengthening the PLA's power projection and its ability to disrupt joint coordination among regional actors. By embedding military and intelligence capabilities within infrastructure initiatives, China secures footholds in the Pacific under the guise of economic development projects. Port leases, wharf upgrades, and covert fishery facilities secure

27 'The 2005 State Council Government Work Report'[2005年国务院政府工作报告], *www.gov.cn*, 5 March 2005, online.

28 Anne-Marie Brady, 'Magic Weapon: China's foreign influence activities under Xi Jinping', *Wilson Center*, 16 September 2017, online.

29 'The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces', *Information Office of the State Council*, April 2013, online.

30 Henryk Szadziewski et al., 'How PRC companies influence diplomatic switches from Taiwan in the Pacific', *The Australian Strategic Policy Institute Blog*, 13 February 2024, online.

31 Jeffrey Wall, 'Australia must demand answers on Asian Development Bank funding in Papua New Guinea', *The Strategist*, 30 September 2020, online.

32 Andrew Hampton, 'The importance of intelligence cooperation with the Pacific'.

key chokepoints, while PLA-linked aeronautical and ICT projects enhance surveillance and command and control capabilities.

1.2 *Building Access to Ports and Wharves*

Over the past two decades, China has constructed and renovated ports and wharves across the Pacific, with Papua New Guinea, Australia, Vanuatu, and Samoa emerging as key sites for these upgrades (Table 1). Among them, Vanuatu's Luganville Wharf in Santos stands out as the most concerning case. Funded by a US$97 million loan from China Eximbank in 2014, the project was carried out by the state-owned Shanghai Construction Group and completed in 2017.[33] It extended the wharf's berth space by 361 meters, allowing it to accommodate large cargo vessels—as well as Chinese warships. Given Luganville's strategic past as one of the largest U.S. naval bases in the Pacific during World War II, China appears to be laying the groundwork for a future military foothold—only the host country had to pay for it.[34] The wharf currently receives very few visits from large vessels.

Figure 2: Luganville Wharf is large enough for powerful warships to dock
Source: Created by the Author using Google Earth

In December 2023, workers in PLA navy-style uniforms were observed illegally clearing

33 'China Eximbank provides RMB 541.9 million government concessional loan for Rehabilitation and Extension of Port Luganville Main Wharf Project', *AidData*, 2024, online.

34 Alex Wooley et al., 'Harboring Global Ambitions: China's Ports Footprint and Implications for Future Overseas Naval Bases', *AidData*, 25 July 2023, online.

land behind Luganville airport in Vanuatu.[35] The unauthorized activity, conducted by a China-linked company, raised concerns due to the workers' military attire and the site's strategic importance. If Beijing secretly establishes a civil-military dual-use facility in Santos, the PLA could disrupt air and sea traffic between the U.S. and Australia, monitor U.S.-Australia joint exercises such as *Talisman Sabre* in the Coral Sea, and gain greater control over the gateway between the Pacific Ocean and the Indo-Pacific region.

In addition to the Luganville Wharf, China holds a 99-year lease of Darwin Port, a 50-year lease of the Port of Melbourne, and a 50 percent stake in the Port of Newcastle through China Merchants Port Holdings.[36] These investments position Australian ports as potential hubs for China's military and logistical platforms, transforming them into key enablers of its regional power projection.

Darwin Port's Chinese owner Shandong Landbridge—whose chairman is lauded as one of the top 10 contributors to China's national defence—exemplifies this effort.[37] China Merchants Port Holdings, which owns 50 percent of Port Newcastle, maintains close ties with the PLA.[38] In 2016, it signed a trilateral strategic partnership with China Electronics Technology Group Corporation and the State Bureau of Surveying and Mapping.[39] This agreement aims to coordinate big data, geographic information, and technologies, creating a "Global Map Plan" for cloud computing, data centres, and maritime situational awareness. China Electronics Technology Group is a leading state-owned defence enterprise, specializing in large-scale military and civilian electronic systems and defence equipment.[40]

Positioned at a key Indo-Pacific trade route and near RAAF Base Williamtown and Wollongong (Port Kembla)—a potential AUKUS nuclear submarine site—Port Newcastle could serve as a strategic hub, strengthening China's regional capabilities in information relay, radar sensing, and positioning systems. Additionally, China's BeiDou navigation system, supported by Australia's ground stations in Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory, and the Northern Territory, could be significantly enhanced

35 Kirsty Needham, 'Chinese firm barred from Vanuatu log exports after landowner complaints', *Reuters*, 23 December 2023, online.

36 Zongyuan Zoe Liu, 'Tracking China's Control of Overseas Ports', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 6 November 2023, online.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Song Lifang, 'China Electronics Technology Group Corporation', *Belt and Road Portal,* 20 October 2016, online.

by the data and imagery from these ports.[41]

Table 1: Selected Cases of Chinese Access to the Pacific Ports

Country/Year of Initiation	Port/ Wharf	Contractor/Investor
Papua New Guinea/2012	Lae Port Project	China Harbour Engineering Company
Vanuatu/2014	Luganville Wharf	Shanghai Construction Group
Australia/2015	Port Darwin	Shandong Landbridge (wins 99-year lease)
Australia/2016	Port of Melbourne	China Investment Corporation (Owns 20 percent)
Australia/2018	Port Newcastle	China Merchants Port Holdings (owns 50 percent)
Papua New Guinea/2020	Daru	Fujian Zhonghong Fishery Company
Samoa/2021	Vaiusu Bay Port	Project Cancelled by Prime Minister Mata'afa in 2021
Samoa/2021	Apia Port	China Harbour Engineering Company
Nauru/2019	Aiwo Port Terminal	China Harbour Engineering Company

Source: Data compiled by the author[42]

41 Although the Western Australia space tracking station, operated by the Swedish Space Corporation, has decided not to renew its contract with BeiDou when it expires, the drafted "Australia's National Air Navigation Plan 2024–27" still includes BeiDou for its civilian services. See 'Western Australia space tracking station to cut ties with China', *Reuters*, 21 September 2020, online; 'Australia's National Air Navigation Plan 2024–27', *Australian Government*, May 2024, online.

42 'China Eximbank provides RMB 771.7 million government concessional loan for Phase 2 of Lae Tidal Basin Industrial Development Project', *AidData*, online; 'China Eximbank provides RMB 541.9 million government concessional loan for Rehabilitation and Extension of Port Luganville Main Wharf Project', *AidData*, online; Alexander Wooley et al., 'Harboring Global Ambitions: China's Ports Footprint and Implications for Future Overseas Naval Bases', *AidData*, July 2023, online; Jenny Wiggins, 'Port of Melbourne tops up CIC's local infrastructure, real estate basket', *Financial Review*, 20 September 2016, online; Turloch Mooney, 'China Merchants takes Newcastle stake amid Australia trade friction', *S&P Global*, 15 June 2018, online; Mark Godfrey, 'Chinese fishery firm signs deal with Papua New Guinea', *Seafood Source*, 17 November 2020, online; 'Samoa govt confirms China-backed port project shelved', *RNZ*, 2 August 2021, online; Zongyuan Zoe Liu, 'Tracking China's Control of Overseas Ports', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 26 August 2024, online.

1.3 *Establishing Fishery Facilities at Chokepoints*

China frequently uses the establishment of fishery facilities to secure access to strategic chokepoints in the Pacific. In 2019, China Sam Enterprise and AVIC International Project Engineering, a subsidiary of a state-owned aerospace and defence group, signed a 75-year lease for Tulagi, an islet in the Solomon Islands with a natural deep-water harbour.[43] The lease included plans for fishery, economic, and airstrip development. The deal sparked both national and international uproar, prompting the Solomon Islands government to cancel the lease.[44]

Tulagi served as the capital of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate from 1896 to 1942.[45] On May 3, 1942, Japanese forces invaded, establishing a refueling and communications base with supporting facilities on Gavutu, Tanambogo, and Florida Islands.[46] This occupation gave the Imperial Japanese Navy a strategic advantage, enhancing defense, reconnaissance, and its ability to disrupt supply lines between the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand. As a result, Tulagi became the site of the U.S.'s first offensive amphibious operation in WWII. This history underscores why China's interest in Tulagi is deeply concerning.

In September 2020, China's Fujian Zhonghong Fishery Company signed an agreement with Papua New Guinea's Fisheries Minister, Lino Tom, and Western Province Governor, Taboi Awi Yoto, to build a Comprehensive Multifunctional Fishery Industrial Park on Daru Island in the Torres Strait.[47] The Torres Strait is a critical defense pivot for Australia, separating its mainland from Papua New Guinea and linking the Arafura and Coral Seas. As a key maritime chokepoint, it controls vital commercial and energy shipping routes between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. By securing this fishery deal, China gains access to the Torres Strait Protected Zone under the Torres Strait Treaty. This treaty permits indigenous Torres Strait Islanders and coastal Papua New Guineans to move freely within the zone for traditional activities, such as fishing, without passports or visas—potentially creating an avenue for Chinese influence in the region.

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43 Kathrin Hille, 'The Chinese companies trying to buy strategic Pacific islands', *Financial Review*, 14 April 2022, online.

44 'Solomons' government vetoes Chinese attempt to lease an island', *The Guardian*, 25 October 2019, online.

45 Frank Short, 'Solomon Islands: Reviving the rich heritage and history of Tulagi', *Linkedin*, 7 September 2020, online.

46 Ibid.

47 'Fujian Zhonghong Fishery Company will Invest in and Construct the 'Comprehensive Multifunctional Fishery Industrial Park' Project in Papua New Guinea', *Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China*, 13 November 2020, online.

Figure 3: Daru Wharf is being constructed
Source: Created by the Author using Google Earth

Recent encounters between the PLA Navy and Australian forces have intensified concerns over Fujian Zhonghong Fishery Company's proposal to build a multifunctional fishery industrial park on Daru Island. On February 17, 2022, a PLA Navy vessel targeted an Australian P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft with a laser while it conducted a routine flight near Australia's northern border, close to Daru Island.[48] A similar incident occurred in April 2022, when another P-8A Poseidon on patrol in the Arafura Sea detected a high-powered laser from a PLA Navy task group.[49] On July 24, 2023, a Chinese Dongdiao-class (Type 815) intelligence ship with four radar domes was observed transiting the Coral Sea as Canberra hosted a large-scale military exercise with its allies.[50]

In October 2024, a Chinese Type 055 destroyer and Type 052D guided-missile destroyer arrived in Port Vila, Vanuatu, marking the first known deployment of this advanced warship class to the Pacific.[51] Chinese media speculated that these warships entered the Java Sea from the South China Sea, passed through either the Sunda or Lombok Strait into the Timor Sea, maneuvered around northern Australia into the Coral

48 'Chinese ship lasing of P-8A Poseidon on 17 February 2022', *Australian Government of Defense*, 22 February 2022, online.

49 Mike Yeo, 'Torres Strait grows in strategic importance,' *ADM*, 3 August 2023, online.

50 Ridzwan Rahmat, 'Australia Releases Image of Chinese Intelligence Ship amid Major Exercise', *JANES*, 25 July 2023, online.

51 'China Type 055 destroyer Xianyang makes first-ever South Pacific deployment to Vanuatu', *Army Recognition*, 21 October 2024, online.

Sea, and ultimately reached Vanuatu.[52] This mission underscores the strategic importance of the Torres Strait and raises questions about whether Chinese warships can navigate it undetected.

Figure 4: The October 2024 arrival of Chinese warships in Port Vila, Vanuatu.[53]

Chinese-constructed fishery facilities on Daru Island not only serve as a strategic node for projecting power and navigating the Torres Strait but are also likely to support China's gray-zone tactics through law enforcement and maritime militia deployment. China is expanding its Coast Guard enforcement in the Pacific to assert control beyond the First, Second, and Third Island Chains.[54] By June 2024, the China Coast Guard had 26 vessels registered in the North Pacific Fisheries Convention Area and another 26 in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Area.[55] China is likely to extend its use of maritime militias, armed and subsidized civilian groups, from the East and South China Seas to the Torres Strait. The Daru Island fishery park could, therefore, act as a cover for China's gray-zone aggression in the region.

52 'The Type 055 destroyer "parachuted" into Vanuatu, taking a detour of over 10,000 kilometers to break into Australia's "backyard"! How did it get there?' [055大驱"空降"瓦努阿图，绕路1万多公里闯进澳大利亚"后花园"！怎么过去的？], *Sina*, 22 October 2024, online.

53 @lfx160219, *X*, 21 October, 2024, online.

54 Anne-Marie Brady, 'Facing up to China's Hybrid Warfare in the Pacific', *The Diplomat*, 3 June 2024, online.

55 Brian Waidelich, 'The People's Republic of China's Contributions to Maritime Governance in the Pacific', *East-West Center*, 20 February 2025, online.

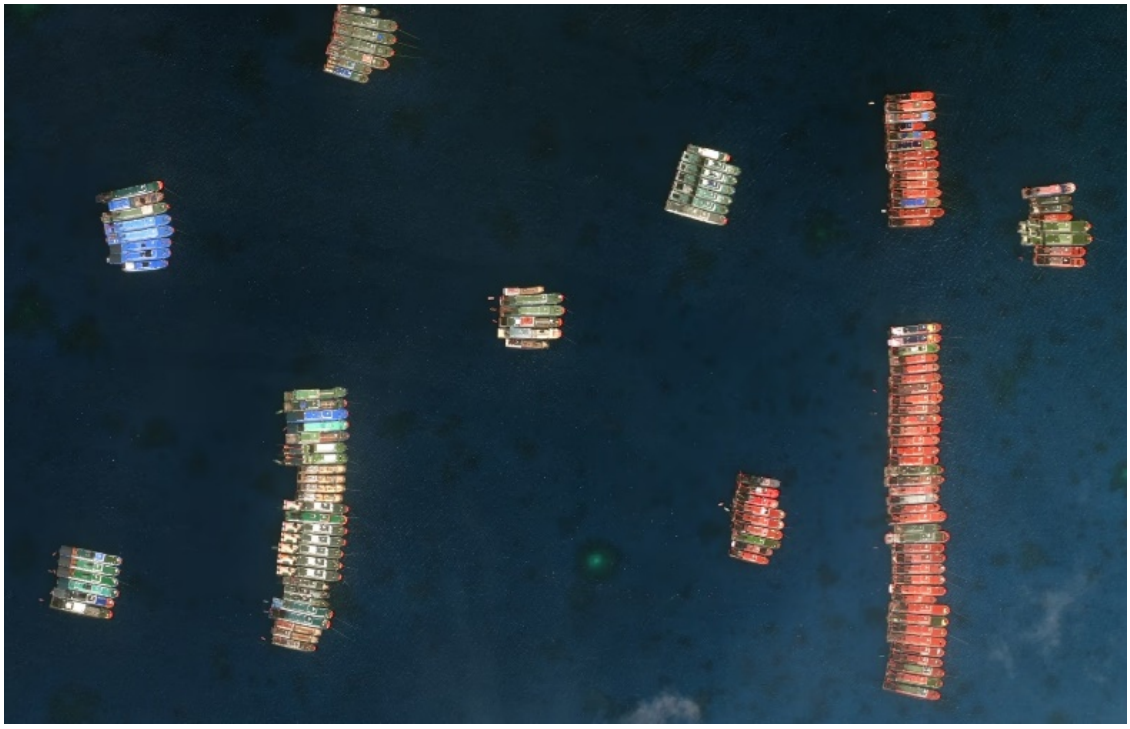

Figure 5: China's maritime militia in the South China Sea in 2021[56]

1.4 *Establishing Aeronautical Hubs*

China is leveraging BRI development projects to establish strategic aviation hubs across the Pacific. The author identified 17 Chinese-contracted airport or airstrip upgrades in Micronesia, Tonga, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands (Table 2). Papua New Guinea, notably, received the most airport investments.

China's extensive airport investments in the Pacific stand in stark contrast to its minimal economic engagement with the region. In 2021, none of these countries ranked among China's top 100 export partners, and Micronesia, Tonga, Kiribati, Samoa, and Vanuatu did not even make the top 150.[57] Despite this lack of significant trade ties, Beijing continues to pursue airport upgrades, suggesting strategic motives beyond economic interests.

The involvement of PLA-linked defense cooperation in these airport renovations raises serious concerns. Notably, the China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC)—a state-owned enterprise with PLA ties—is the primary contractor for many regional

56 Helen Davidson, 'China's maritime militia: the shadowy armada whose existence Beijing rarely acknowledges', *The Guardian*, 13 June, 2024, online.

57 'China trade balance, exports and imports by country 2021', *WITS*, 2024, online.

aeronautical projects (Table 2).[58] The U.S. Department of Defense classifies CRCC as a Chinese military company.[59] Its subsidiary, China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation, operates alongside China Harbour Engineering Corporation, which is owned by China Communications Construction Company. The latter, also linked to the PLA, has faced U.S. sanctions for building military outposts in the South China Sea.[60]

China's state-owned defense firms have long infiltrated the Pacific's air traffic sector, particularly in countries with national militaries like Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and Tonga. China National Aero Technology Corp. once held a 50 percent stake in domestic airline Air Fiji before its closure in 2009.[61] Air Fiji also flew Harbin Y-12 planes, which are produced by China's main military aeronautical company (Harbin Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation). Air Fiji closed after a serious crash of a Harbin Y-12.[62] Between 2000 and 2020, Fiji was the second-largest recipient of Chinese military aid, behind Papua New Guinea and ahead of Tonga and Vanuatu.[63] The involvement of PLA-linked companies in aeronautical projects, coupled with military aid, signals a strategic push to expand Chinese influence in the region's aviation sector.

China's state-owned defense-related enterprises in the Pacific are not just extending airstrips but reconstructing airports, including terminals, with Chinese technology and telecommunications. These upgrades enhance China's reconnaissance and command-and-control (C2) capabilities, transmitting data back to Beijing and potentially coordinating with Chinese-operated ports, piers, and fisheries for both civilian and military use. With China normalizing its military presence and drills in the Pacific, these covert aeronautical systems will play a growing role in gathering regional C⁴ISRK (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and kill chain) data.[64]

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58 CRCC is the successor of the Railway Corps of the People's Liberation Army. See Zhenzhu Shu and Shujie Chen, 'Case Study on the Spin-off of China Railway Construction Corporation', *Scientific Journal of Economics and Management Research*, 2024, 6:11, 1-14.

59 'Entities Identified as Chinese Military Companies Operating in the United States in accordance with Section 1260H of the William M. ("Mac") Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021', *U.S. Department of Defense*, 2024, online.

60 'US sanctions over South China Sea will not affect blacklisted Chinese construction giant CCCC, company says', *South China Morning Post*, 30 August 2020, online.

61 'Oceanic Voyages aviation in the Pacific', *Asian Development Bank*, 2007, online.

62 Chris Loh, 'What Happened To Regional Carrier Air Fiji?', *Simple Flying*, 2 May 2021, online.

63 Xiao Liang, 'What can we learn from China's military aid to the Pacific?', *SIPRI*, 20 June 2022, online.

64 Stephen Dziedzic, Evan Wasuka and Iris Zhao, 'Leaked documents reveal Chinese company's aviation plans for Solomon Islands to become a regional hub', *ABC NEWS*, 29 April 2022, online; Anne-Marie Brady, "When China knocks at the door of New Caledonia," *ASPI*, 23 August 2024, online.

Table 2: China's Aeronautical Projects in the Pacific

Country/Year of Initiation	Aeronautical Projects	Contractor
Micronesia/2004	Chuuk International Airport Terminal Renovation Project	China Railway Construction Corporation
Tonga/2004	Fua'amotu International Airport renovation project	China Civil Aviation Airport Construction Corporation
Samoa/2014	Faleolo International Airport upgrade project	Shanghai Construction Group
Kiribati/2021	Upgrading the Airstrip on Canton Island Airport	N/A
Vanuatu/2022	Upgrading Norsup Airport	China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation
Vanuatu/2022	Pekoa airport runway extension	China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation
Papua New Guinea/ 2014	Hoskins Airport upgrading	China Overseas Engineering Group Co.
Papua New Guinea/ 2016	Expansion Project of Jackson International Airport (Port Moresby International Airport)	Beijing International Engineering Co., Ltd.
Papua New Guinea/ 2018	Gurney Airport pavement upgrading and runway extension	Sinohydro Corporation
Papua New Guinea/ 2018	Wewak Airport pavement upgrading and new terminal	China Shenyang International
Papua New Guinea/ 2018	Vanimo Airport runway extension and new terminal	China Railway Construction Corporation
Papua New Guinea/ 2019	Tari Airport construction	China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation
Papua New Guinea/ 2020	Kavieng Airport runway extension and new terminal	China Railway Construction Corporation
Papua New Guinea/ 2020	Momote Airport pavement upgrading and new terminal	China Harbour Engineering Corporation
Papua New Guinea/ 2022	Mendi Airport pavement upgrading and new terminal	Sinohydro Corporation
Papua New Guinea/ 2023	Gurney airport new terminal and power supply system upgrading	China Railway Construction Engineering Group

Solomon Islands/ 2020	Munda International Airport terminal	China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation

Source: Data compiled by the author[65]

1.5 *Infiltrating ICT Infrastructures*

China's expansion of ICT infrastructure, particularly in the Global South, has raised concerns about security and digital authoritarianism.[66] The Digital Silk Road—the technological branch of the Belt and Road Initiative—aims to extend China's control over data and communications across political, economic, and social spheres in recipient countries.[67] These infrastructures also empower Chinese enterprises to expand influence in mobile payments, AI, data analytics, and IoT, especially in smart cities and smart ports. In the Pacific, China's ICT projects primarily serve strategic and military interests over social or economic goals.

Huawei, a state-backed and heavily subsidized company with close ties to China's military and state security sector, has carried out numerous ICT projects across the Pacific (Table 3).[68] These projects span integrated government information systems, national broadband networks, submarine cables, and mobile communication towers. Recipient countries include Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga, the Cook Islands, and Samoa. Papua New Guinea has received the most Chinese ICT investment, paralleling its role in aeronautical upgrades. At the same time, it has also experienced some of the highest rates of cyberattacks, exposing the cybersecurity vulnerabilities in Chinese ICT infrastructure.[69]

In Vanuatu, Huawei officially launched a single fiber-optic network project in 2008, but

65 'Chinese Government provides $2.3 million grant — via ETCA — for Chuuk International Airport Terminal Renovation Project', *AidData*, 5 December 2022, online; 'Chinese government provided technical assistance to Tonga for the upgrading of the Fua'amotu International Airport', *AidData*, 5 December 2022, online; 'China Eximbank provides RMB 340 million government concessional loan for Faleolo International Airport Upgrade Project', *AidData*, 28 May 2019, online; 'Kiribati says China-backed Pacific airstrip project for civilian use', *Reuters*, 13 May 2021, online; 'Norsup Airport to accommodate ATR 72-600', *Vanuatu Daily Post*, 18 June 2022, online; 'VT7B Pekoa Airport Runway Extension', *Vanuatu Daily Post*, 21 May 2022, online; 'Papua New Guinea: Civil Aviation Development Investment Program – Tranche 2 & 3', *National Airports Corporation for the Asian Development Bank*, March 2021, online; 'Solomon Islands Roads and Aviation Project', *World Bank*, 17 December 2020, online; Domingo I-Kwei Yang, 'The Weaponization of BRI in the South Pacific', D*efense Security Brief*, 22 December 2022, online.

66 Richard Heeks et al., 'China's digital expansion in the Global South: Systematic literature review and future research agenda', *The Information Society*, 2024, 40:2, 69-95.

67 John Hemmings, 'Reconstructing Order: The Geopolitical Risks in China's Digital Silk Road', *Asia Policy*, 2020, 15: 1, 5-22.

68 Anne-Marie Brady, Jichang Lulu and Sam Pheloung, 'Holding a Pen in One Hand, Gripping a Gun in the Other: China's Exploitation of Civilian Channels for Military Purposes in New Zealand', *New Zealand Parliament*, 23 July 2020, online.

69 James Orme, 'Huawei-built Papua New Guinea data centre riddled with security flaws', *Techerati*, 12 August 2020, online.

its implementation and upgrades spanned over 13 years (2008–2021).[70] This has two key implications. First, Huawei's presence may appear limited to one ICT project, avoiding immediate scrutiny. Second, continuous upgrades allow Huawei to integrate the latest technologies, enhancing access to and storage of Vanuatu's official data. Prolonged engagement also embeds Huawei personnel within the country, reflecting a long-term data acquisition strategy. Notably, many Huawei staff maintain deep links with China's military and intelligence sectors, raising concerns about potential security risks.[71]

Table 3: Selected Chinese ICT Infrastructures in the Pacific

Country/Year of Implementation	ICT Infrastructures	Contractor/ Financier
Papua New Guinea/2011	Integrated Government Information System (IGIS) Project (included the Port Moresby data center)	China Eximbank
Papua New Guinea/2016	Establishing an electronic government network from a hub in Port Moresby.	China Eximbank
Papua New Guinea/2016	National Broadband Transmission Network (included a Kumul Submarine Cable Project)	Huawei Marine
Papua New Guinea/2022	Project transition from analogue signals to digital signals of broadcasting networks	China Eximbank
Papua New Guinea/2023	Repair the Kumul Submarine Cable Network	Huawei Marine
Solomon Island/2017	The first submarine cable in the Solomon Islands	Huawei Marine
Solomon Island/2022	National broadband infrastructure project; build 161 mobile communication towers	Huawei
Fiji/2015	National ICT planning	Huawei
Fiji/2019	10 Gbps passive optical network; ultra-fast fiber broadband	Huawei
Vanuatu/2008	Creation of a SDH microwave and VSAT transmission network connecting Port Vila; a fiber-optic network connecting government agencies	Huawei

70 'E-Government', *Pacific Aid Map*, 2024, online.

71 Arjun Kharpal, 'Huawei staff share deep links with Chinese military, new study claims', *CNBC*, 8 July 2019, online.

Tonga/2022	Resumption of communications; provide telecom facilities	Huawei Philippines
Cook Islands/2017	4.5G LTE-Advanced network solution (Partnership with Bluesky Cook Islands)	Huawei
Samoa/2012	National Broadband Highway fiber-optic cable network	Huawei
Samoa/2017	4.5G LTE-Advanced network	Huawei

Source: Data compiled by the author[72]

2. The Tactical Impact of Dual-Use Infrastructure

Dual-use ports, airstrips, and ICT networks enable Beijing to expand its power projection while enhancing its area-denial capability. The outcome will be to restrict or disrupt regional actors' freedom of movement and action. The increasing presence of PLA-linked enterprises and a growing logistics network heighten concerns over regional security, efforts to counter Beijing's influence, and persistent surveillance.

2.1 *Dual-use infrastructures are force multipliers*

China's strategy of weaponising dual-use infrastructure and turning it into a force multiplier is well-documented. A prime example is its militarisation of the Spratly and Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, where it has deployed anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems, laser and jamming equipment, and fighter jets under the guise of infrastructure development.[73]

Beyond its claimed sovereign territory, state-backed Chinese contractors take a more covert approach, integrating dual-use capabilities into foreign infrastructure. PRC companies are required by law to cooperate with PRC intelligence instructions. Dual-use facilities enhance the PLA's overseas operational reach and serve China's strategic interests. For instance, satellite imagery suggests that a Chinese-built civilian facility in Abu Dhabi could be repurposed for PLA use.[74] China's expanded pier in Djibouti, originally built for commercial purposes, can simultaneously accommodate the PLA-N's Type 075 amphibious assault ship and a PLA-N aircraft carrier.[75]

The China-financed renovation of Cambodia's Ream Naval Base mirrors the Djibouti pier. The newly constructed 363-meter deep-water pier on Ream's western shore is large enough to dock any vessel in China's naval fleet, including the 300-meter-long

72 'Pacific Aid Map', Lowy Institute, 2024, online; 'AidData', *William & Mary's Global Research Institute*, 2024, online.

73 John Crace, 'China has fully militarized three islands in South China Sea, US admiral says', *The Guardian*, 21 March 2022, online.

74 C. Raja Mohan, 'Why China Is Acquiring Foreign Military Bases', *APLN*, 23 November 2021, online.

75 Brian Gicheru Kinyua, 'New Pier at China's Djibouti Base Could Accommodate Carriers', *The Maritime Executive*, 20 April 2021, online.

Type 003 Fujian aircraft carrier (CV-18).[76] Even before the project's completion, two PLA Navy corvettes were spotted docked at Ream in December 2023.[77] Since then, Chinese warships have docked there at least eight times before October 2024.

China's strategy of weaponising overseas infrastructure is evident in its plan to expand global connectivity through the BRI, as outlined in its 14th Five-Year Plan.[78] Xi Jinping emphasizes that achieving national rejuvenation requires resilience, adaptability, and the integration of land, sea, air, and cyberspace networks—making BRI the backbone of China's strategic agenda.

To advance this integrated connectivity, Professor Zheng Chongwei (郑崇伟) of the Dalian Naval Academy and the National University of Defense Technology, along with other PLA-affiliated scholars, advocate for establishing maritime strategic nodes and a surveillance system for the Maritime Silk Road.[79] Zheng argues that developing strategic installations will strengthen China's naval supply, repair, intelligence, and surveillance capabilities, enhancing its ability to control key maritime regions. He states that China's military helicopters, carrier-based aircraft, drones, cruise missiles, and other assets would achieve optimal effectiveness through being based at overseas infrastructure projects.

2.2 *Establishing a civil-military dual-use ecosystem*

China's infrastructure projects in the Pacific are creating a civil-military dual-use network, via agreements signed with regional partners.[80] This ecosystem strengthens China's power projection and prepares for the possible shift from grey-zone coercion to kinetic warfare in the future. Rather than establishing additional overseas military bases, which face heavy scrutiny, China relies on its dual-use facilities for access, mobilization, and strategic operations. These infrastructures serve as key enablers for the PLA, allowing it to penetrate the Second and Third Island Chains for interception, distraction, and area denial. Greater control over Pacific ports, airports, and ICT networks also gives China leverage to dissuade or deter U.S. partners and allies from countering its regional expansion.

Chinese-built infrastructures often embed Chinese agents—typically state-backed enterprises or contractors—who remain as long-term suppliers or partners. For

76 Sun Narin, 'Cambodian Ream Naval Base Modernized by China Nears Completion: Defense Ministry', *VOA*, 26 July 2023, online.

77 Nectar Gan, 'The first Chinese warships have docked at a newly expanded Cambodian naval base. Should the US be worried?', *CNN*, 6 December 2023, online.

78 'The Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development and Long Range Objectives through the Year 2035 of the People's Republic of China', *NDRC*, 2021, online.

79 Chong-wei Zheng [郑崇伟] et al., "The Strategy of Maritime Silk Road in the 21st century: Construction of Integrated Application Platform [经略 21世纪海上丝绸之路: 综合应用平台建设]" Ocean Development and Management [海洋开发与管理], 2017, 34:2, 52-57.

80 Anne-Marie Brady, 'Facing up to China's Hybrid Warfare in the Pacific', *The Diplomat*, 3 June 2024, online.

example, Huawei has maintained a continuous presence in Vanuatu for over a decade through its involvement in ICT projects. Other state-owned enterprises, including Shanghai Construction Group, China National Building Material Group, and Sino-Van Fisheries Limited, operate in Vanuatu—many with defense ties that could facilitate PLA mobilization from peacetime to wartime.[81] China's dual-use ecosystem extends beyond physical infrastructure to software upgrades and a network of CCP-loyal companies and individuals working to expand its influence and united front agenda in the region.[82]

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, could be a model for a Chinese civil-military dual-use ecosystem.[83] China doesn't need a formal base, as its strategic investments already grant extensive access. These include the Lae Port Project, a fishery industrial park on Daru Island, multiple airstrip developments, and government information systems with a data center in Port Moresby. China has strengthened Papua New Guinea's power grid, modernised the Taurama Barracks military hospital, and embedded intelligence agents through ties with PNG police and its internal security agency.[84]

Such a Chinese-built ecosystem is even more concerning in the Pacific if we examine the implications through the lens of the PLA's long-range missile capabilities.[85] The Chinese intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test launch into the Pacific Ocean on September 25, 2024, underscores China's potential to transport, launch or guide missiles from its controlled ports, airstrips, and even civilian or military vessels, as shorter distances improve operational efficiency.[86]

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81 Take Sino-Van Fisheries Limited as an example. This project is implemented by Jiangsu Provincial Construction Group Co., Ltd. [江苏省建筑工程集团有限公司], which was founded by the Construction Bureau of Jiangsu Province [江苏省住建厅]. This means that Jiangsu Provincial Construction Group is affiliated with and guided by the Office for Military-Civilian Integration Development [军民融合发展办公室] under the Jiangsu Development and Reform Commission [江苏省发展和改革委员会]. See 'Chinese Government provides RMB 40 million grant for Fish Processing Facilities Project', *AidData*, 15 March 2025, online; 'Company Profile', *JPCEC*, 15 March 2025, online; 'Office for Military-Civilian Integration Development', *Jiangsu Development and Reform Commission*, 21 November 2017, online.

82 Anne-Marie Brady, 'When China knocks at the door of New Caledonia', *ASPI*, 23 August 2024, online.

83 Stephen Engle and Ben Westcott, 'Xi Never Asked for Military Base, Papua New Guinea Leader Says', *Bloomberg*, 19 November 2022, online.

84 Kirsty Needham, 'China, Papua New Guinea in talks on policing, security cooperation – minister', *Reuters*, 29 January 2024, online; Peter Connolly, 'China's Police Security in the Pacific Islands', *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, 30 May 2024, online.

85 David Kilcullen, 'Wake-up call: Pacific islands are potential missile launch pads', *Australian Foreign Affairs*, 1 February 2024, online.

86 Nectar Gan, 'China fires ICBM into Pacific Ocean in first such public test in decades as regional tensions flare', *CNN*, 26 September 2024, online; Hui Zhang, 'China's openness about its latest nuclear missile test shows growing confidence vis-à-vis the United States', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 16 October 2024, online.

Figure 6: China Conducts ICBM Test Over Pacific in 2024[87]

China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System plays a key role in enhancing the positional data of long-range missile capabilities.[88] Since 2018, BeiDou has been able to cover all countries across the South West Pacific, via ground stations in PRC embassies or consulates, as well as the three ground stations in Australia.[89] The continued presence of BeiDou's affiliated ground stations at Australia's Yarragadee, Mount Stromlo, and Katherine is particularly concerning.[90] China's 2024 ICBM test over the Pacific demonstrates BeiDou's growing maturity in the region.

The expanding ecosystem of Chinese-built launch-capable and positioning-capable sites raises serious security concerns. With Papua New Guinea positioned at the southern tip of the Second Island Chain near Australia, China's dual-use infrastructure presents a direct threat to both Australia and Guam.

2.3 *Creating an integrated blue-water logistics support system*

Military power hinges on logistics. As the Chinese saying goes, "Before troops move, fodder and provisions go first" (兵马未动，粮草先行). China prioritizes sustainable blue-water logistics to break through the First Island Chain, expand power projection, and assert dominance in the Indo-Pacific. With fewer overseas bases than the U.S., it relies on overseas infrastructures, commercial partnerships, and development projects to extend its reach.

Since 2015, the PLA Navy has surpassed the U.S. in total battle-force ships and is

87 Ridzwan Rahmat, 'Update: China flexes long-range strike capabilities with ICBM test', *Janes*, 26 September 2024, online.

88 Fergus Ryan, Danielle Cave and Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, 'Mapping more of China's technology giants: AI and surveillance', *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, 29 November 2019, online.

89 Brady, 'When China knocks at the door of New Caledonia'.

90 Fergus Hunter and Peter Hartcher, 'Australia 'helping' China develop its rival system to American GPS', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 January 2019, online.

expected to exceed 400 vessels by 2030 (Figure 7). While the U.S. still holds an edge in blue-water operations, experts predict that by 2035, China will field around 270 far-seas warships, including submarines, catapult-equipped carriers (5–6 total), frigates, combat logistics ships, and more.[91] This growth will drive an urgent need for supply and maintenance across the Pacific, Indian Ocean, and beyond.

The question is not whether, but when, China will complete a civil-military logistics system in the Pacific. PLA Navy vessels—including the Type 680 training ship Qi Jiguang and the hospital ship Peace Ark—have already ramped up port visits in Oceania since 2010, signaling China's steady expansion of its naval support network.[92]

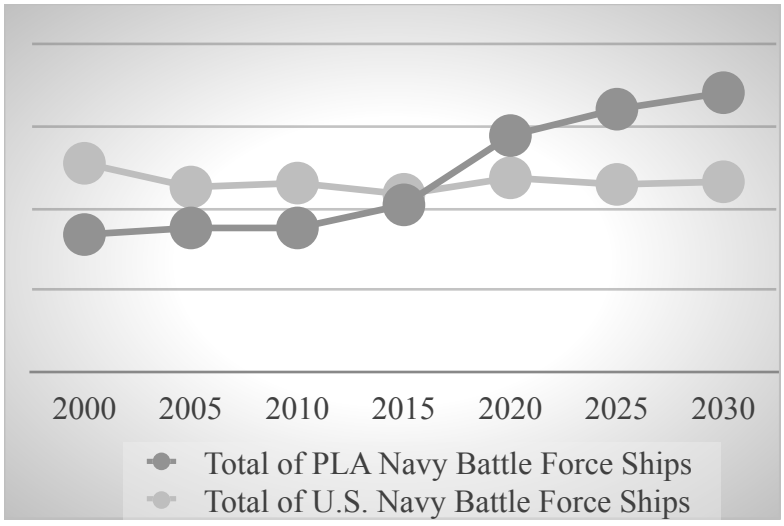

Figure 7: Compare Chinese and U.S. Navy Battle Force Ships, 2000-2030
Source: Data compiled by the author[93]

China has long pursued a civil-military logistics system to support its expanding naval operations. Since Hu Jintao's 2004 call for a greater global PLA presence, logistics has been central to China's force projection strategy.[94] The 2008 defense white paper emphasized distant-water capabilities, while Xi Jinping's 2017 push for a world-class

91 Michael A. McDevitt, 'China's Navy Will Be the World's Largest in 2035', *USNI*, 1 February 2020, online.

92 Andrew Orchard, 'China's Navy in Pacific Island Ports', *The Diplomat*, 16 September 2023, online.

93 'China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress', *Congressional Research Service*, 30 January 2024, online.

94 'Military Commentary: On the Historical Mission of Our Army in the New Century and New Phase' [军事评论：论新世纪新阶段我军的历史使命], Sina, 9 January 2006, online.

navy reinforced this goal.[95] The BRI has further integrated military logistics into overseas commerce. In 2016, China's *National Defense Transportation Law* mandated civilian support for military operations, and in 2017, Xi Jinping established a commission to embed military logistics within economic and social development.[96]

A 2017 paper in the Journal of Military Transportation University （军事交通学院学报） outlines three strategies for weaponising China's overseas infrastructure, applicable to its Pacific expansion.[97] First, China should establish a logistics hub with technicians, maintenance facilities, and a fast, mobile transport network for efficient troop support. Second, it should leverage state-backed enterprises or platforms like China COSCO Shipping and LOGINK (National Public Information Platform for Transportation and Logistics), a unified digital logistics and trade platform administered by China's Ministry of Transport, to integrate civil-military logistics. Third, China must develop multifunctional facilities with advanced ICT systems, enabling seamless coordination and repurposing of development projects into a dual-use logistics network.

2.4 *Building intelligence-gathering outposts*

China can easily turn its Pacific infrastructure into intelligence-gathering outposts, exploiting the region's proximity to Australia—a key U.S. ally. Strategic placements near Australia enhance China's ability to monitor, collect intelligence, and counter U.S. regional coordination. Under China's *National Intelligence Law*, all Chinese entities must support intelligence efforts, effectively making contractors and developers in Pacific projects extensions of Beijing's surveillance apparatus.[98] Ports, telecom towers, and container cranes within Chinese-operated facilities double as spying tools, tracking Western supply chains and military shipments.

State-owned China COSCO Shipping, closely linked to the PLA, plays a crucial role.[99] Retired PLA officers are embedded in its operations, and its global fleet of 400 container vessels and hundreds of tankers provides logistical support to the PLA Navy.[100] Additionally, its roll-on/roll-off (RO-RO) ferries could enhance China's

95 'China's National Defense in 2008', *Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China*, 20 January 2009, online; 'Xi Jinping: Strive to Build a Powerful and Modernized Navy'[習近平：努力建設一支強大的現代化海軍], *CPCNEWS*, 24 May 2017, online.

96 'National Defense Transportation Law', *People.cn*, 1 January 2017, online; 'Xi Jinping: Focus Efforts on Key Areas of Development for Military-Civilian Integration', *www.people.com.cn*, 22 September 2017, online.

97 Journal of Military Transportation University is directly supervised by the PLA's Army Military Transportation University. See Liu Dalei [刘大雷], Yu Hongmin [于洪敏], and Zhang Hao [张浩], "Equipment Support in Overseas Military Actions" [我军海外军事行动装备保障问题研究], *Journal of Military Transportation University* [军事交通学院学报], 2017, 19: 9, 42.

98 'China's National Intelligence Law', *People's Government of Guangdong Province*, 2019, online.

99 Chris Horton, 'COSCO: China's shipping giant expands its global influence', *Nikkei Inc.* 13 May 2022, online.

100 'The 2018 Central Government Program for the Reception and Placement of Military Officers Transitioning to Civilian Roles' [2018年中央单位接收安置军队转业干部计划], Ministry of Veterans Affairs, 2018, online.

amphibious capabilities.[101] Beyond logistics, COSCO's fleet serves as a key intelligence-gathering platform in the Pacific. Another concern is LOGINK, a digital logistics and trade platform developed by Chinese government. Given China COSCO Shipping's close integration with this digital platform, it often promotes this software for free to coordinate with ports, freight carriers, and other organizations. Research has revealed data security issues with LOGINK, showing how it gives Chinese companies an advantage through comprehensive logistics data.[102] Using this platform allows China to control logistics data and potentially block or modify trade routes.

3. Strategic Implications of China's Dual-Use Facilities in the Pacific

The strategic implications of these undercover infrastructures indicate that China's Pacific ambitions extend beyond influence and to outright hegemony. Beijing aims to reshape regional power dynamics and challenge U.S.-led alliances. Its military expansion, strategic infrastructure projects, and resource acquisitions reinforce this agenda.

3.1 *Expanding influence beyond Taiwan to the Third Island Chain*

China's long-term strategy in the Pacific centers on regional hegemony, with ambitions extending beyond Taiwan. It seeks to control the First Island Chain and expand its influence to the Second and Third Island Chains. Securing greater control in the Pacific enhances China's ability to dominate Taiwan while reducing threats from the U.S. and its partners. If China controls and militarises Taiwan while expanding its influence over the Second and Third Island Chains, countries like Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand may be compelled to reconsider their security partnerships with the U.S., bandwagon with Beijing, and shift the regional power balance in China's favor.

China's growing military presence and advanced capabilities reflect its hegemonic ambitions, and occupying Taiwan would be its first step toward breaking the First Island Chain. Its April 2023 and December 2022 exercises suggest the PLA Navy could soon threaten Guam or the Second Island Chain.[103] Chinese carrier groups have already demonstrated the ability to operate within striking distance of Guam, while the PLA's long-range assets, like the H-6N bomber and DF-26 anti-ship missile, further extend its reach. China's ability to project power over 5,000 kilometers highlights its drive to bypass U.S.-led Island Chains and assert dominance in the region.[104]

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101 John Konrad, 'Is COSCO China's Secret Invasion Fleet?', *Gcaptain*, 1 April 2023, online.

102 Albert Vidal, 'Securing Maritime Data: The Battle Against China's LOGINK in U.S. and European Ports', *Center for Maritime Strategy*, 25 July 2023, online.

103 Guermantes Lailari, 'Shandong Carrier Group returns to port: What does its deployment mean?' *Taiwan News*, 27 April 2023, online.

104 Richard D. Fisher, Jr, 'Richard D. Fisher, Jr on Taiwan: China targets two island chains', *Taipei Times*, 4 May 2020, online.

Chinese military scholars argue that to become a sea power, China must breach the First and Second Island chains.[105] China is seeking strategic pivots in the Pacific to rival the U.S. and protect energy routes.[106] By combining its hard power with dual-use infrastructure, China aims to challenge U.S. dominance and reshape the regional order.

China seeks to disrupt U.S.-led minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific by weaponising its dual-use infrastructure. These efforts target the U.S.-led alliances, including the Quad, AUKUS, and the hub-and-spokes system, which has evolved under the Biden Administration to focus on interoperability and forward-leaning capabilities.[107] Joint exercises like the U.S.-Japan-South Korea trilateral, the U.S.-Australia-Japan-Philippines drills, and others are prime examples of efforts to enhance cooperation and military interoperability in the region.

China's strategy involves leveraging infrastructure in Pacific Island countries, such as upgrading the airfield at Momote Airport on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea. This provides China with a foothold to monitor and disrupt U.S. operations, potentially intercepting joint missions between the U.S. and regional partners, given the proximity between Momote Airport and Lombrum Naval Base, a chokepoint for defense cooperation among Papua New Guinea, Australia and the U.S.[108] While Momote Airport has a low level of air traffic—only operating one flight a day—the renovated Chinese airstrip can still accommodate most commercial and military aircraft, including the Chinese Y-20, the largest military transport airplane in service.[109]

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105 Yang, Z [杨震]. and X. Fang [方晓志], 'Strategic Choices for China's Sea Power and Navy Buildup: A Maritime Security Perspective' [海洋安全视域下的中国海权战略选择与海军建设]. *Global Review* [国际展望], 2015, 4, 85-101.

106 Denghua Zhang, 'China's military engagement with Pacific Island countries', Asia & the Pacific Policy Society, 17 August 2020, online.

107 I-Kwei Yang [楊一逵], 'Exploring the Nexus between a Transformed U.S. Hub-and-Spokes System and Taiwan Contingency' [美國軸輻體系變化與台灣有事之連動], in *2023 Report on the Security Landscape of the Indo-Pacific Region—Democracy's Reassembly vs. Authoritarianism* [023印太區域安全情勢評估報告—民主與威權的再集結]. Edited by Ming-Shih Shen & Ya-Ling Lin. Taipei: INDSR, 2023, 81-90.

108 Kim Nguyen and Varij Shah, 'Analyzing Strategic Value of Chinese-Built Infrastructure Projects in Papua New Guinea', *Tearline*, 29 August 2023, online.

109 Ibid.

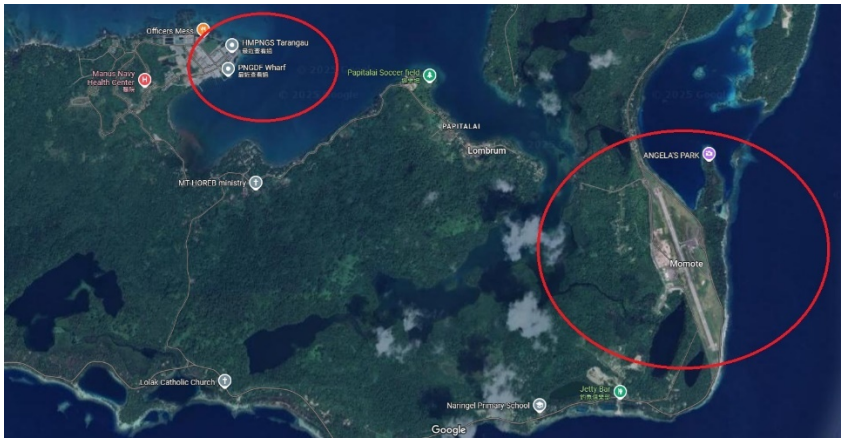

Figure 8: Momote Airport is close to Lombrum Naval Base (HMPNGS Tarangau)
Source: Created by the Author using Google Earth

By securing strategic nodes like Manus Island, China can weaken U.S.-led efforts and challenge the balance of power in the Second and Third Island Chains. Specifically, if China gains full access to Manus Island, it could intercept joint operations between the Philippines and U.S. partners in the Pacific.[110] As the Pacific becomes a critical front in U.S.-China competition, China will continue investing in infrastructure to exploit gaps in U.S.-led security alliances.

3.2 *Securing resources and critical minerals*

China ranks among the world's top consumers of resources and critical minerals, with experts forecasting surging demand for rare-earth elements, copper, aluminum, graphite, and nickel.[111] China's State Reserve Bureau continues expanding its stockpiles of critical minerals, widening the competitive gap in supply chains.[112] Securing these resources remains central to China's long-term infrastructure strategy in the Pacific. By integrating Chinese-built infrastructure into a civil-military ecosystem, China can safeguard mineral projects, facilitate resource trade via maritime routes, and enhance surveillance within the region's energy and mineral sectors.

The Pacific's abundant resources and minerals are vital to China's economic growth and PLA modernisation. Australia remains China's top supplier of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and minerals, with iron ore and lithium leading exports.[113] Papua New Guinea

110 Ben Wan Beng Ho, 'The Strategic Significance of Manus Island for the U.S. Navy', *U.S. Naval Institute*, December 2018, online.

111 Wang An Jian and Gao Xinrui, 'China's Energy and Important Mineral Resources Demand Perspective', *Bulletin of Chinese Academy of Sciences*, 35:3, 2020, 338-344.

112 Fabian Erismann, 'China stockpiles Copper, Nickel and Cobalt – has the commodity sector bottomed out?', *Earth Resource Investments AG*, 12 August 2022, online.

113 Emma Davies, 'High Voltage: Could supplying US critical minerals be risky business for our China exports?', *Stockhead*, 11 July 2024, online.

holds major deposits of gold, copper, nickel, and cobalt, primarily exporting nickel mattes to China.[114] More than 90 percent of the Solomon Islands' extractive resources, including gold, bauxite, and nickel, go to China.[115] Fiji has vast undeveloped copper reserves, while New Caledonia contains a quarter of the world's nickel reserves.[116] In 2022, 62.3 percent of all New Caledonia's exports went to China, the bulk of which were minerals exports.[117]

China's strategic mineral development in the Pacific is exemplified by the Ramu Nickel Cobalt Project in Papua New Guinea. Built, owned, and operated by China's state-owned Ramu Nico Management (MCC) Ltd., it represents China's largest overseas nickel-cobalt investment, with an annual output of 31,000 tons of nickel and 3,000 tons of cobalt.[118] Since 2013, Chinese state-backed mining groups have also explored seabed mining opportunities in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa and Kiribati.[119]

Mawei Shipbuilding Limited (马尾造船有限公司), a Chinese state-owned firm known for warship production, has even built the first large vessel for deep-sea mining in Papua New Guinea.[120] While Mawei Shipbuilding is the manufacturer of the deep-sea mining vessel, Nautilus Minerals Niugini Limited and Eda Kopa, a subsidiary of PNG Kumul Minerals Holdings Ltd., will establish a joint venture, Solwara 1, to operate the mining project.[121] This partnership allows Mawei Shipbuilding to gain firsthand expertise in advanced propulsion, positioning, automation, and underwater robotics from Canada's Nautilus Minerals, while directly applying these technologies to Papua New Guinea's waters. Beyond resource extraction, deep-sea mining vessels are seen as a strategic asset, bolstering China's underwater capabilities and situational awareness—benefiting seabed mining, submarine operations, and unmanned underwater vehicle activities in the region.

Critical minerals are essential for clean energy technologies, aircraft engines, missiles, high-performance batteries, command and control systems, and space technologies. To secure a sustainable supply chain and maritime trade routes, China is expected to

114 Emma Davies, 'High Voltage: Could supplying US critical minerals be risky business for our China exports?'; 'Chinese nickel sulphate producers facing raw material supply woes as Papua New Guinea bans vessels at ports', *SMM Information & Technology Co.*, Ltd., 31 March 2020, online.

115 Josh Nicholas, 'The $3bn bargain: how China dominates Pacific mining, logging and fishing,' *The Guardian*, 30 May 2021, online.

116 Nick Bainton and Emilka Skrzypek, 'Pacific nations are extraordinarily rich in critical minerals. But mining them may take a terrible toll,' *The Conversation*, 3 August 2022, online.

117 'New Caledonia', *OEC World*, 2025, online.

118 'Ramu Nickel Cobalt Project', *MRDC*, 2024, online.

119 Denghua Zhang, 'China looking under the sea for opportunities in the Pacific', *East Asia Forum*, 30 June 2018, online.

120 Ibid.

121 'Mawei Shipbuilding's $500 million canceled order vessel has found a new buyer' [马尾造船价值5亿美元撤单船有着落了], *wap.eworldship.com*, 5 December, 2018, online.

strengthen its regional infrastructure coordination and expand its dual-use ecosystem both above and below the water.

3.3 *Establishing a Southern Link*

China aims to establish a Southern Link, connecting Asia and South America via Pacific strategic infrastructure hubs. Control over Pacific ports, airstrips, and ICT systems could serve dual-use purposes, enabling transit, logistics, and expanded influence in the U.S. backyard. As of February 2025, 21 Latin American and Caribbean countries have joined the BRI, including 9 South American countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela).[122] Additionally, 10 Pacific Island countries participate (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Micronesia, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu), positioning the BRI as a potential bridge between the two regions.[123]

China has actively promoted this Southern Link strategy, trying to influence public opinion in the host countries. The Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, under the Ministry of Commerce of China, has pitched New Zealand's role as a key connector between the Pacific and Latin America.[124] New Zealand has never formally signed on to BRI.[125] It signed a non-binding Memorandum of Arrangement to discuss potential BRI cooperation, but no longer holds talks on this matter.[126] Yet Chinese state media portrays the BRI as the cornerstone of China-New Zealand ties, even though New Zealand has no BRI projects and has stopped discussing potential BRI cooperation with China.[127] Despite New Zealand refusing to discuss BRI any further, China is persisting in amplifying the Southern Link with New Zealand as a key strategic hub.[128]

Inaugurated in November 2024, Peru's Chancay Port—a Chinese-funded project, majority-owned by state-owned China COSCO Shipping—has raised concerns over its potential military use by the PLA.[129] Positioned as a key trade and maritime hub linking

122 'Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)', *Green Finance and Development Center*, February 2025, online.

123 Ibid.

124 'The Southern Link', *New Zealand China Council*, 24 September 2024, online.

125 Anne-Marie Brady, 'Magic Weapons: China's political influence activities under Xi Jinping', *Wilson Center,* 18 September 2017, online.

126 Ibid.

127 Chen Xin, 'BRI becomes backbone of Sino-NZ ties', *China Daily*, 20 June 2024, online; Laura Walters, 'The swathe of mysterious Belt and Road agreements', *Newsroom*, 23 May 2024, online.

128 Anne-Marie Brady, 'Magic Weapons: China's political influence activities under Xi Jinping'; 'How New Zealand Could Connect Latin America with China', *Biz Latin Hub Group*, 17 July 2023, online.

129 Julieta Pelcastre and Diálogo, 'Peru's Chancay Port and the Risks of China's Growing Influence', *Dialogo-Americas*, 6 February 2025, online.

South America, the Pacific, and China, the port strengthens China's regional foothold.[130] Viewed alongside China's strategic ports, airports, and ICT projects in the Pacific, Chancay appears to be part of a broader effort to establish a global network of logistical and dual-use military facilities across the hemisphere, which could potentially target the U.S. from the South.[131]

The Espacio Lejano Station, a Chinese ground station in Neuquén, Argentina, was built by China Harbor and is operated by Great Wall Technology Company Limited, a subsidiary of the PLA's former Strategic Support Force.[132] This satellite ground station has direct access to information that can be transmitted to the PLA and may even support the PLA's strategic radar guidance and positioning technology.[133]

A similar pattern of development can be found in Chile, which holds abundant reserves of copper and lithium and is also geographically close to the Arctic North. China's National Astronomical Observatories of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (中国科学院国家天文台) is collaborating with Universidad Católica del Norte on a joint project to establish an observatory at Cerro Ventarrones in Chile's Atacama Desert.[134] This observatory will be constructed by China State Engineering Construction Corporation, acompany deeply involved in military construction and rooted in the PLA's Infrastructure Engineering Corps Unit (基建工程兵部队).[135] Defense experts believe that such Chinese-sponsored satellite infrastructure serves as an extension of China's military influence, enhancing the PLA's space situational awareness and providing strategic advantages to China's hypersonic weapons programs targeting the U.S. homeland.[136]

With the PLA Navy's fleet set to exceed 400 ships by 2030 (Figure 7), China's naval presence in the Pacific is expected to grow. Ground stations like Espacio Lejano and the astronomical observatory on Cerro Ventarrones provide China with opportunities to enhance its maritime and space situational awareness for both civilian and military purposes, while also strengthening its "Southern Link" between the Pacific and South

130 Franklin Briceno, 'Chinese-backed port project in Peru to be the 'gateway from South America to Asia,' official says', *AP*, 8 August 2023, online.

131 Anne-Marie Brady, *China as a Polar Great Power*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

132 Diálogo Américas, 'Chinese Space Station on Argentine Soil Continues to Arouse Suspicion', *Diálogo Américas*, 22 May 2023, online; 'Chinese Government provides $50 million for construction of space station in Neuquén Province', *AidData*, 18 June 2023, online.

133 I-Kwei Yang [楊一逵], 'A Preliminary Exploration of China's Space-Based Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Deployment in Latin America' [初探中國在拉美太空之「情監偵」部署], *Liberty Times Net*, 25 June 2023, online.

134 Didi Kirsten Tatlow, 'Chinese Space Project Under Review After Newsweek Investigation', *Newsweek*, 18 March 2025, online.

135 Ibid.; China Construction Eighth Engineering Division Corp., Ltd. 'Company Profile' [公司简介], China Construction Eighth Engineering Division Corp., Ltd. [中国建筑第八工程局有限公司], 23 April 2023, online.

136 Didi Kirsten Tatlow, 'China's Quest for Supremacy Moves into Space', *Newsweek*, 18 December 2024, online.

America.

4. Conclusion

China's dual-use infrastructure projects in the South West Pacific have far-reaching security implications. By embedding military and intelligence capabilities into seemingly civilian developments, China is reshaping the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific. These dual-use infrastructures—ports, airstrips, and ICT networks—provide the PLA with a strategic advantage, potentially restricting U.S. and allied military mobility in the region. As a result, China's growing presence challenges the existing security order and the status quo, which has maintained regional stability for decades.

If China consolidates control over these strategic nodes, it could manipulate trade flows, disrupt global markets, and exert political pressure on both regional and global actors. Countries that rely on open and secure sea lanes—such as the U.S., Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific small island developing states—must recognise the long-term risks posed by China's infrastructures located at geostrategic chokepoints.

Ultimately, China's expansion in the Pacific is not only about territorial influence but about shaping the future balance of power. Chinese infrastructure projects have the potential to become military footholds and multiply power projection capability. A proactive response—through strengthened alliances, strategic investments, and regional cooperation—is essential to preserving peace and stability. For the U.S., its allies, and regional actors, this is not just about countering China; it is about defending a free, open, and rules-based international order in the Pacific.

Recommendations:

i. The U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific SIDS should issue joint statement at the Pacific Islands Forum and the G20 Summit regarding the PLA's increasing military presence, including missile testing and combat exercises in the region, and request a reduction in China's military activities in the Pacific.
ii. The U.S., Australia, New Zealand, France, and Taiwan should initiate joint research projects to raise public awareness of the risks of dependency on China's dual-use infrastructure and investigate its correlation with PLA activities in the Pacific. They should establish an archive to track and disclose these facilities, along with Chinese investments and development projects in the region. For instance, the activities of China COSCO Shipping and Mawei Shipbuilding in the Pacific should be closely monitored.
iii. The Five Eyes partners should establish a shared satellite imagery program to monitor the regional movements of Chinese-built or leased dual-use infrastructure, as well as Chinese dual-use ships. Vanuatu's Luganville Wharf, Papua New Guinea's Daru Island, Lae Port, and Port Moresby, along with Australia's Port of Newcastle, should be prioritized for scrutiny.
iv. The U.S., Australia, and New Zealand should collaborate with Taiwan and regional stakeholders on possible scenarios through Tabletop Exercises for a "Taiwan Contingency," examining how the PLA might mobilize dual-use infrastructure in the region to disrupt and coerce regional actors. Like-minded allies and partners should have a playbook to push back against such a worst-case scenario.
v. The U.S., Australia, and New Zealand, in collaboration with Japan and Taiwan, can strengthen Pacific SIDS' infrastructure and reduce their reliance on China's investments and supply chains on both hardware and software. For example, since 2021, Taiwan has supported Tuvalu's 4G/LTE infrastructure and contributed to the regional submarine cable project, enhancing connectivity. These efforts reduce the region's vulnerability to China's civil-military dual-use supply chains. More public discussions and conferences should be held to raise awareness of the associated risks. Diplomacy and investment are crucial for building a more secure, independent Pacific through collaborative infrastructure development.
vi. The U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, and Japan should collaborate with Pacific countries to rebuild manufacturing capabilities of smart cranes, dredging equipment, automated container handling systems, maritime construction, runway and pavement construction, air traffic control and navigation systems, terminal construction, and ICT infrastructure. Regional actors must begin mitigating risks by reducing their dependence on Chinese supply chains in these sectors.
vii. Australia should deepen its relations with Papua New Guinea and enhance joint law enforcement and maritime patrol capabilities in the Torres Strait. China's increasing influence in Papua New Guinea could pose long-term security risks for Australia, as well as for US-Australia cooperation, given the region's proximity.